James Ridner

Presents...

STRANGE CONSPIRACIES FROM THE MANTLE

An Original Reddit Short Story

JAMES RIDNER

STRANGE CONSPIRACIES FROM THE MANTLE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Original poster: /u/SinfulPrince

Debut release platform: /r/nosleep (Reddit.com)

Period of serialization: 23–26 August 2019

Current release platform: Internet Archive

LOG ENTRY #001

LOCATION: CORE FACILITY, USFGD RADIANT BRANCH
DATESTAMP: 2019/08/24
TIMECODE: 08:50 UTC

Every time I try to forget what transpired that day—what we saw, those "things", whatever the hell they were—I never seem able to let go of the incident. Now, I wish it could.

Well, I'm a geophysicist for the United States government's Federal Geological Division (USFGD for short). My job demands a tremendous amount of time investigating the Earth, primarily its surface and what lies beneath. For a while, I was focused on Arctic rock formations, which weren't all that engaging.

I received a new assignment: research the outer core for *The Radiant Corp.*, the USFGD's most esteemed branch focused on inner structural research. I laughed, thinking it was some elaborate joke. What caught me off guard was how I was contacted. Only top geologists were employed by Radiant, yet, somehow, I was among them, likely due to my rigorous, well-regarded papers on core seismology. Opting out of work at my main office, I was directed to a site eight hours away after packing a few changes of clothes and research gear. I suspected this was going to be a significant endeavor.

Teetering on the edge of passing out at the wheel, I finally made it to the site after the grueling drive. The sheer size of the place floored me. Hell, the building was so enormous it could've passed as its own sovereign state. Rolling up to the gate, I was stunned to find no security checkpoint. Normally, there'd be at least some screening—and for a facility like this, you'd expect military-level oversight.

Just as I was mulling this over, a figure emerged—a silhouette clad in a sharp suit. I figured this

was the man in charge. He motioned for me to stop and exit the vehicle.

I got out and was welcomed by the man, dressed head to toe in black with a blood-red tie. He had dark, straight hair, piercing blue eyes that seemed to look through you, and a grin that lacked even a hint of sincerity.

"Greetings, Dr. Cochran. We're glad you could join us on such short notice. It's a pleasure to meet you. Your work on seismic activity and Earth's structural dynamics has been both brilliant and illuminating. That sort of genius doesn't go unnoticed. That's why I brought you here—to help us with something important," he rasped, sounding like a jaded university lecturer.

"Well, thank you. The drive was brutal, so I'm a little drained. Is there a hotel nearby I could crash at?"

He hesitated, then responded quickly. "Ah, no need for that! We have accommodations inside the facility. If you're tired, by all means rest. I'll walk you to your quarters."

I nodded, thanked him, and followed him toward the massive, foreboding structure. Under the exterior lighting, I realized we were walking through a vacant lot leading up to the building's entryway. The entrance was a sterile white tunnel devoid of sound or motion—it sent a chill straight through me.

"So, sir, I've got a few questions: Who are you, exactly? Why was I brought here? And what's the compensation for my involvement?" I asked, my voice wavering—this man radiated serious "you won't wake up tomorrow" energy.

"Oh yes, I should've briefed you sooner. I'm the director of research and chief scientist of the USFGD's Radiant branch. Name's Barron Moreland. People around here just call me "Dir. Moreland", but with your credentials and impressive contributions, let's be informal and stick with Moreland. I'm tasked with overseeing all federal geological research and experiments.

"My team and I brought you and a select group of scientists here because this trial involves highly specialized geological expertise. You've worked extensively in Whole-Earth geology, which is exactly what we need. I've been developing this project for some time, especially after we noticed "atypically pronounced frequencies" originating deep in the mantle.

"As for payment, we're offering you double your standard rate. This isn't easy work—we know that—and you won't be shortchanged. Please understand."

I nodded again, and we moved through the deserted parking lot toward the tunnel. Moreland paused, seemingly waiting on something—I wasn't sure what.

A few minutes passed. Then, without a word, he resumed his stride into the tunnel. I followed. Silence returned. Darkness enveloped everything. Time lost all meaning. I pushed my exhausted body to keep up with Moreland's inhuman pace. Even when I lagged, he didn't slow. Everything felt off, but I focused on the promised compensation.

After what seemed like hours, I finally glimpsed a faint light ahead.

"Alright then, we're here. That light marks the sleeping quarters. Rest up. We begin the project after you've had some sleep."

I examined the sleeping area. What unsettled me wasn't the lighting or layout—it was the design. The rooms resembled containment units more than resting quarters. We passed several metallic doors marked with numbers, only visible in the soft center-room glow. We stopped at a room labeled *255*. Moreland fumbled with the keys like a lunatic. Eventually, he unlocked it and swung open the door.

The interior was bleak: a single bed with a barebones pillow-and-sheet setup and a toilet to the side. The whole scene reeked of bad intentions.

"G'night, Cochran. I'll see you in the morning."

–END LOG–

LOG ENTRY #002

LOCATION: EATING QUARTERS, CORE FACILITY, USFGD RADIANT BRANCH
DATESTAMP: 2019/08/25
TIMECODE: 11:30 UTC

A thunderous knock jerked me awake:
"WAKE UP SLEEPING BEAUTY!" someone called out cheerily. "Breakfast is ready!"

I rubbed my eyes and slipped on my shoes. With no windows in the place, I couldn't even guess what time it was. The door creaked open, revealing a tall, dark-skinned man with a solid build, a stern face, and metal-lined teeth. He looked thoroughly joyless.

He motioned for me to follow him, so I did, toward a thick green door labeled *EATING QUARTERS*.

"Well, well. Morning to you. Looks like someone's had decent shut-eye. Let's sit down and go over the day's plans over breakfast."

I took a seat at a table that looked just like the ones at my old research facility's cafeteria. We made small talk until the head chef brought out the meal.

To my surprise, despite the dismal sleeping arrangements, the breakfast was fantastic: two strips of roasted cinnamon bacon, four evenly sized waffles, scrambled and over-easy eggs, and French toast. Moreland just had bacon and a strong black Italian coffee.

"Dr. Cochran, let me explain the gravity of this operation. As I said, my team and I became

interested because of the situation's nature. Supposedly, some of my peers received reports about peculiar sounds detected under the crust. I dug into them myself. Found some bizarre soundwaves—but sadly, no audio recordings.

"That's where you come in. You're more experienced with seismic audio work. If you can gather a proper sample, we might finally close this chapter."

His explanation piqued my curiosity. I remembered a similar case, dismissed as a natural anomaly. I never bought that, but couldn't pursue it due to a sudden directive from Dir. Moreland. Odd, in hindsight.

"Moreland, I'm in. I think this could lead to some remarkable findings."

The bastard smiled that same crooked smile, stood, and waved me toward a different exit.

We stepped into a narrow corridor and reached another door. Inside was an immense hole, dead center in the floor, surrounded by a chaos of monitors, towers, and gear.

"This is your workspace. Everything's ready. Now get started—immediately."

Nodding, I dared to ask:
"Moreland, sir… just how complete is this setup?"

"All you have to do is safely send the equipment down. Collect graphical and audio readings and forward them to my associates. I'll give you their contacts. Finish fast and you'll be on your way—with payment, no strings attached."

–END LOG–

LOG ENTRY #003

LOCATION: UNKNOWN EXCAVATION SITE, CORE FACILITY, USFGD RADIANT BRANCH
DATESTAMP: 2019/08/25
TIMECODE: 20:45 UTC

I spent the bulk of my shift charting a path and placing markers toward the mantle. We'd need a drone capable of recording audio, and it had to be fully operational within a few hours or we were toast. The boss would've had us lackeys all incinerated for being late.

Eventually, through punishing trial and error, my team got the drone running. I informed Moreland, who happened to be nearby—convenient timing.

I'll never forget how his frozen, no-nonsense face exploded into a showman's flair. Oddly amusing. Deeply unsettling.

"I'll be damned. That's outstanding, Dr. Cochran! You've outdone yourself. Now send that bastard down—we want this wrapped up. Pray to God we get something worthwhile."

I positioned the drone at the pit's edge and launched it.

Soon, it began transmitting critical data. It neared the site of the supposed disturbance. Moreland and I waited, nerves taut. Then—abruptly—the silence shattered.

Graph readings spiked dramatically. I activated the audio system to make sure we didn't miss a thing.

What we heard… it defied all classification. The sound—a grotesque symphony of thunderous crashes, deep guttural moans, and some grotesque licking noise—shook us to our core. It was no beast of man or nature.

We couldn't shut the signal off. We just stood there, horrified, glued to the data stream and the haunting chorus from the abyss.

Then the unthinkable: the system collecting our feed crashed. Everything we worked for—gone!

Moreland's dream lay in shambles. I was paralyzed by terror. Dread, fury, heartbreak—all consuming us.

"Fuck, it's all gone. We had it. We had it. And now what do we have? A story no one'll believe. God dammit, we were so fucking close! Fuck!" Moreland howled.

Even so, he honored his word. I got paid. *Good enough.*

As I drove home, the image burned into my mind—unshakable. I merged into traffic, haunted. *What the hell did we hear down there? What twisted thing could that even be? Do I pry further into Radiant and its shady director? Is working for that character... really worthwhile?*

--END LOG–

LOG ENTRY #004

LOCATION: DR. COCHRAN'S RESIDENCE
DATESTAMP: 2019/08/26
TIMECODE: 19:00 UTC

A lot has happened lately, and I've barely had a moment to sit down and document what occurred. It all began when I got home and found an envelope on the front porch with an unmarked return address and no sender. The envelope looked ragged and damp, radiated by the partly cloudy noon sunlight. *What a curious thing to receive by post.*

Inside, I dropped my bag with relief and started to settle down—until that damn letter caught my eye again. I hesitated before opening it. The anonymous sender handwriting looked less like human script and more like the frantic scrawl of a deranged chicken. It took me nearly an hour to fully decipher what he was trying to say.

Herein contains the letter's contents:

> DR. COCHRAN:
>
> Glad you're reading this. I'm Prof. H. Townsend—first name abbreviated for privacy reasons. There's a lot to cover and not much time, so I'll cut to the chase: there's far more going on beneath the surface than what you witnessed during that core-disturbance experiment.
>
> You're probably wondering, "How the hell was a hole that enormous even possible with current tech?" "What the fuck was that thing I heard?" The truth is, the government's way ahead of what they let the public believe. We've been lied to—flat out. Behind closed doors,

we've reached technological feats most people would call science fiction. It was these very tools that helped us detect those core anomalies.

The sound you heard? It wasn't human. You were right to be shaken—I was too. God knows I'd like to forget that godforsaken noise. We went through hell just to identify it.

What I'm about to tell you might get me killed, but screw it—I can't live with what I sacrificed just to crack this mystery. This wasn't some routine black-budget project. It was orchestrated by Radiant. Let's say, they're dirty businessmen the government cloaks with deceptive mission statements.

Radiant had been monitoring this stuff for some time but didn't reach out to the feds until a few months before your assignment. Your selection was delayed because Radiant didn't see value in your involvement—at first. That's when I was brought in, along with a few others, to start digging.

I was sent to the same facility as you, but the place was a nightmare. Grimy, reeking, practically rotting. The smell alone—like a mixture of decay and sewage—was enough to make your stomach churn. From that, I figured they were conducting experiments darker than I could imagine. Our quarters were cramped, pitch black, devoid of breathable air and light. Rats clanged inside the walls every night, their racket robbing us of sleep. Two hours of rest was a luxury. We were yanked awake like livestock and forced to obey every command—including cleaning our plates to the last bite. Anyone who refused was "corrected," and that stench? It always returned.

We were reduced to drones, breaking our backs digging that damn hole using Radiant's cutting-edge tech—stuff I still can't believe exists. Three weeks of mental erosion and sleep deprivation later, the excavation was complete. They paid us off—generously—and sent us packing, under the strictest silence. We knew better than to speak. These people weren't bound by government or law.

One fateful day, a package showed up in my room in the sleeping quarters. No return address. Inside was a flash drive loaded with PDFs, videos, audio clips. I tried saving the contents to my PC, but the system crashed mid-transfer. The files became corrupted—gibberish. I assume they had some sort of timer installed to destroy the contents.

Still, I salvaged maybe a third of the files. Most were dull, bureaucratic nonsense. Except two. One video was entitled ***WHEN_HE_SNITCHES***. It showed a man who looked eerily like an old colleague of mine, Dr. Feldstein, tied to a chair under a flickering bulb. His face was beaten, barely recognizable.

After a few still moments, a door slammed open. Feldstein stirred. A man in a gas mask entered, brandishing a black whip. Then the beatings began. Feldstein screamed—muffled, shrill—and the camera lens turned red with blood. Ten straight minutes of that. The footage

ended on a close-up of Feldstein's mangled face, with a caption in bold black text, "THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS TO TRAITORS!"

The second video—***THEM_VISUAL***—was worse. It came from a drone's POV, navigating deep below the Earth's surface. For a while, it was uneventful—until something shifted in the frame. A shape emerged from the right. That same screeching noise erupted—louder than before, almost enough to rupture my eardrums.

But the drone kept going—until one of the creatures lunged at the camera. The footage glitched out into static. Curious, I went frame-by-frame. After hours combing through it, I found the image. What I saw made my blood run cold.

That creature—you've seen it—had jet-black, reptilian skin. No eyes, no nostrils, no mouth. Just horns and fangs that could rip a tank in half. It had to be seventy or eighty feet tall, nearly two hundred feet around. I don't even understand how it made a sound with no visible organs. It wasn't earthly. It couldn't be.

I never found out who sent the drive. Maybe one of the other researchers. As of now, I've got no appetite to expose Radiant or go public. But I'm passing this burden to you—if you're willing. If not, well… you'll be silenced anyway. I'm sure they're already watching.

Please don't let me down. Bring these bastards to light. Uncover the truth about those abominations. And keep yourself alive.

Farewell, I wish you all the best, Dr. Cochran.

PROF. H. TOWNSEND

--END LOG–

LOG ENTRY #005

LOCATION: DR. COCHRAN'S RESIDENCE
DATESTAMP: 2019/08/26
TIMECODE: 19:20 UTC

As soon as I read the last line, I crushed the letter in my fist and rushed to tear it up, trying to stuff the fragments down the drain. But then came the pounding at the door.

"Open the damn door! Dr. Cochran, we know you're in there. Comply, and we won't use force. Don't test us."

I froze. After a moment's panic, I played along. I unlatched the door. Two men in black suits stood waiting.

"Much obliged. Let's have a little chat in your living room," the one with the gravelly voice said.

I sheepishly led them in and took my seat on my chair. They followed, seating themselves across from me. Nearly identical: dark hair, pale complexions, pristine teeth that didn't look real. Their eyes were hidden behind thick glasses. I'd peg them as mid-forties.

"Well Dr. Cochran," said the first, "we've been informed you received a message from Prof. Townsend. That so?"

"Um… erm."

I anxiously gulped my salivation.

“Y-yes... indeed sir.”

The second one chimed in, his voice calmer:
“Good. Now destroy it. Forget it existed. Don’t get any bright ideas. If you cross us, we will end you.”

“Yes... sir. Er- I shall.”

The gruff one spoke:
“Glad we understand each other. We know the letter’s already gone. Just don’t act on anything it told you to do.”

The first man gestured for the other to stand. I escorted them to the door. They left without another word, save for a crooked smirk from the grouchy one. Their car disappeared down the street.

I stood there, utterly paralyzed. Then I shut the door and slumped onto my bed, staring at the ceiling.

Who the hell... w-were those guys?

Then it hit me:
Maybe... just maybe—the professor was telling the truth.

--END LOG–

THE END